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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
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INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHXD/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0236

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 MOSCOW 003419

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/25/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GG](#) [RS](#) [AZ](#) [UP](#) [MD](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: DFM KARASIN ON IRAQ, GEORGIA, UKRAINE,
TRANSNISTRIA, NAGORNO-KARABAKH

REF: NOV 21 MFA DIPNOTE 5226

Classified By: Ambassador John R. Beyrle for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a November 25 meeting, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin sought further information on the alleged November 19 collision between a U.S. convoy vehicle and a Russian embassy vehicle in Baghdad (reftel). He called the November 23 shooting near the Georgian and Polish presidents a "cheap provocation" by Saakashvili that could overshadow the success of the Geneva process. Russia would seek an end to the Geneva process by the end of the year or "early 2009," but wanted the discussions and working groups to continue in a different format, such as the UN or OSCE. Karasin emphasized that Russia supported the continuation of international monitoring mechanisms in Georgia, but repeated South Ossetian approval was required. He accused Georgia of using refugee issues to put emotional pressure on South Ossetia, and pressed for the working group discussions on refugees and security to continue in parallel. Karasin called for cooperation with Ukraine on the financial crisis and thought the energy dispute could be settled once Ukraine's internal political crisis was resolved. However, the Holodomor and Russian language issues remained irritants. Characterizing the Transnistria conflict as solvable, Karasin criticized U.S. Ambassador Chaudry's November 24 demand for Russian troops to withdraw from Transnistria as an "artificial complication." On Nagorno-Karabakh, Karasin said the Azeri and Armenian governments were working on confidence-building measures, and noted the possibility of establishing an expert group. End Summary.

Iraq

¶2. (C) In a November 25 meeting, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin told the Ambassador that Russia considered the alleged November 19 collision between a U.S. convoy vehicle and a Russian embassy vehicle to be a "serious and dramatic" issue. He called for a thorough investigation into why the incident happened, in order to ensure that such incidents could not reoccur. Averting that such events should not have an impact on bilateral U.S.-Russian relations, Karasin insisted on a detailed explanation of the incident.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador told Karasin that an investigation was under way, although the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad had not been able to identify the convoy yet, and had contacted the Russian embassy there to request further details. He noted the U.S. had only learned about the incident when the GOR called us November 21, 18 hours after it allegedly occurred.

Georgia

Geneva talks

14. (C) Agreeing with A/S Fried's characterization of the results of the November 18 Geneva talks as "modest," Karasin nonetheless commended them for having brought the Georgians to talk eye to eye with South Ossetians and Abkhaz. While A/S Fried had noted the usefulness of granting each party equal status, EU Special Representative Pierre Morel had introduced "artificial complications" by originally calling for meetings on different levels. Georgia had continued its "provocative" actions by including in its delegation Alan Parastayev, a South Ossetian who had been sentenced for making an attempt on the life of the republic's "president" Kokoity; Dmitry Sanakoyev, the head of the Tbilisi-backed Provisional Administration in South Ossetia; and Lorik Marshania, member of the Abkhaz government in exile. Karasin said it had taken much effort to persuade the Abkhaz and South Ossetians to sit down with them, by arguing that they had equal status as Georgian "professionals," but were "phantoms of a past opera" with regard to any status in South Ossetia or Abkhazia.

15. (C) Responding to the Ambassador's question, Karasin stated that Russia believed the Geneva talks should conclude by the end of 2008. Karasin argued the nature of the talks could change with the "more emotional" Czech Republic's assumption of the EU presidency. Saying that Russia did not want the Geneva talks to become institutionalized, he suggested conducting any further meetings under the umbrella of existing formats, such as the UN or OSCE. He called on

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the U.S. to convince Georgia that it was only through dialogue that quiet, stable, and good-neighborly relations could be established in the region.

16. (C) The Ambassador pushed back on Russia's intent to terminate the Geneva process, arguing that Geneva was the only forum in which to make progress on the security and refugee issues. He rejected the notion that a Czech EU presidency was a reason to discontinue the talks. Karasin said the Russians "since September" had said Geneva needed to be a dynamic forum that showed results by the end of 2008. He added that they were "not categorical" that December 17-18 must be the final session, and could consider "one more, perhaps early in 2009" -- if the December discussions showed that there was something to be gained by the continuation.

Polish motorcade shooting incident

17. (C) Karasin called the November 23 shootings near Georgian President Saakashvili and Polish President Kaczynski's motorcade at the border to South Ossetia a "cheap provocation," which was "typical behavior" of Saakashvili. Questioning the wisdom of two presidents driving up to a checkpoint, Karasin said FM Lavrov's characterization of the event as a "staged provocation" was too soft, it was rather an "act of stupidity" designed to provoke new tensions and show the Russian forces up as "evil." If the international community did not jointly condemn such Georgian behavior, it would encourage new violence. If such provocations continued, the "modest successes" of the Geneva talks that A/S Fried had praised would soon be "totally overshadowed" by the incident.

18. (C) Ambassador Beyrle rejected Karasin's characterization of the November 23 shooting as a staged provocation, calling such an idea extreme and unconstructive. Instead, the incident showed the linkage of events in Georgia and in Geneva, underscoring the necessity of continuing the Geneva talks in order to find mechanisms to investigate incidents and increase monitoring, including by allowing international observers into South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The U.S. was

concerned that the slow pace of the political process in Geneva opened a gap in relation to the pace of events on the ground, creating the potential for "mischief," which could turn into violence.

Monitors

¶9. (C) Lamenting a lack of insight into the EU's operations in Georgia, Karasin said that an agreement on future contacts with EU representatives had been reached on the fringes of the November 18 Geneva talks during a meeting with the head of the EU monitoring mission Hans-Joerg Haber. Haber had explained that the EU monitors conducted many snap inspections in the border area, detecting a strengthening of Georgian troops in the six-kilometer border zone, with weapons of up to 85 cm caliber. Karasin said that he would meet Haber December 1-2 to discuss a mechanism of cooperation between the EU observer mission and the Russian military in South Ossetia.

¶10. (C) Insisting that Russian soldiers were the key element to provide security inside South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Karasin confirmed Russian support for the UN mission in Abkhazia and the OSCE in South Ossetia, but repeated demands that the UN mission needed to change its name to remove any reference to Georgia. He reiterated that Russia did not oppose access by the monitors to South Ossetia, but it required South Ossetian approval. South Ossetian authorities still felt betrayed by the OSCE monitors, according to Karasin. For that reason, they would not speak with head of the OSCE Mission in Georgia Terhi Hakkala, and demanded that different monitors than those in August be designated. Before any monitors could be allowed inside South Ossetia, it was necessary to see how they handled complaints and incidents in the border zone. While the OSCE machinery was complicated and indecisive, and it was not clear what the OSCE envisioned for its South Ossetia monitoring mission, Karasin said he had the impression that changes were possible. The missions needed to start work fast and not wait for the Geneva talks.

¶11. (C) Ambassador Beyrle pushed for movement on the UNOMIG mandate, due to expire in February, and argued that South Ossetian emotions could no longer govern decisions on OSCE monitors, four months after the military conflict. The OSCE knew very well what it wanted to do, but the failure to

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extend its mission in September came because Russia refused to agree to the OSCE mandate.

IDPs/Refugees

¶12. (C) Karasin accused the GoG of using the refugee situation to place emotional pressure on South Ossetia and Abkhazia; for example, by trying to force Georgians to return to the Upper Kodori region against their will, and pushing for refugees to return to their destroyed homes now, at the onset of the cold season. Noting that thousands of refugees had already returned to South Ossetia and that in the future, there would be many nationalities living in the region, Karasin argued that it was necessary to obtain Georgian, South Ossetian, and Abkhaz support for the principle of refugee returns and signature of a declaration of the multi-ethnicity of the states. In this regard, Karasin praised South Ossetian "president" Kokoity for having opened 12 Georgian-language schools in South Ossetia.

¶13. (C) Karasin rejected DAS Bryza's call for the Geneva IDP/refugee working group to move forward at a faster pace than the security working group. Karasin insisted that the two needed to move in lockstep, in order to provide channels of cooperation between the IDP and security groups.

¶14. (C) The Ambassador rejected Karasin's claim that Georgia was politicizing the refugee issue, stressing the Russians needed to stop seeing a provocation in everything the GoG did. He asserted the U.S. saw no problems with the IDP working group meeting earlier -- with the onset of winter, it made no sense to wait till mid-December.

Ukraine

¶15. (C) Karasin said he hoped there would be no cut-off of gas to Ukraine this winter, and deplored the media attention paid to Gazprom-Naftohaz negotiations, which he described as a "normal business argument." Once Ukraine's internal political situation stabilized, the energy issue could easily be resolved. Karasin spoke out in favor of Russian-Ukrainian cooperation in the financial crisis, given that the countries' economies were so similar and intertwined.

¶16. (C) The Holodomor issue, however, was a serious issue, Karasin stated. Describing Yushchenko's November 22 statement as the "unreadable" work of a "sick man," Karasin rejected calling the famine a genocide and said Russia simply wanted to talk about all the famine victims, not just in Ukraine.

¶17. (C) Karasin said that he had discussed a wide range of issues in his November 24 meeting with Ukrainian Ambassador to Russia Hryshchenko, and had agreed to visit Kyiv in December to continue the constructive talks, including on the shut-down of Russian TV stations in Ukraine. Karasin stressed the importance of preserving Russian language culture and schooling in Ukraine, arguing that one quarter of the population had Russian roots, while one third considered Russian a native language. The Ambassador told Karasin the U.S. had no double standards and had told Ukraine and Georgia that media restrictions were a bad idea -- a point also valid in Russia.

Transnistria

¶18. (C) Karasin criticized U.S. Ambassador Chaudry's November 24 call for Russian troops to withdraw from Transnistria as an "artificial complication." As there were only several hundred Russian soldiers protecting the arms depot in Transnistria, it was much more important to get Moldovan president Voronin and Transnistrian leader Smirnov to meet and work out next steps within the 5 plus 2 process. Karasin asserted that Russia was working the issue "every day," battling personal resentment, errors, and petty disagreements on issues like the meeting venue. While calling both Voronin and Smirnov difficult, Karasin admitted the Transnistrian leadership was a "complicating factor." Still, a resolution of this conflict was the most likely of all frozen conflicts.

Nagorno-Karabakh

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¶19. (C) On Nagorno-Karabakh, Karasin said that the Azeri and Armenian governments were now looking to identify confidence-building measures, possibly by establishing a group of five to six experts or members of the political elite from both countries. In the meantime, the Minsk Group would meet December 4 in Helsinki to discuss next steps.
BEYRLE